Transnational Biography: Reassessment of personal biographical experiences in internet forums among Russian migrants in Germany

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In this paper author describes some transnational social spaces in the internet and find answers to following questions: What kind of collective identities are built up in these transnational social spaces? How does the comparison between different countries (with different cultural and legal practices) influence the everyday practices of migrants from Russia in Germany? How does biographical discourse in the internet influence the normative notion of the biographical work? In order to answer these questions, firstly the theoretical background is discussed, and secondly the study is presented. Thereafter some results of the study will be critically discussed.

Key words: internet, biography, migrants, collective identity, transnational, social spaces

1. Introduction

Migrants from Russian Federation and other countries of the former Soviet Union have become a considerable group in Germany since the wave of migration from the beginning of 1990s. According to the Federal Statistical Office (Statistisches Bundesamt 2010: 84) 2,529,000 migrants from the former Soviet Union were living in Germany 2009, which is 3.08% of its total population.

This group outwardly appears homogeneous, but is inwardly heterogeneous. In this article I would like to address three subgroups of Russian migrants: "Resettlers", "Quota refugees" and "Transmigrants" (for definition see Section 2). These groups have had different experiences of migration, both with regard to their legal right as migrants to live in Germany, as well as their biographical experiences. However these biographical experiences are often homogeneous within the subgroups. For example people differ (or are similar) in their regional provenance, in their educational background, in their motivation to migrate, which are usually the result of their earlier varied biographical experiences. After their arrival to Germany they usually passed through different administration pathways, which in turn meant different migration experiences and provided them with different chances to adapt to, and integrate in their new situation.

At the same time these differences do not automatically lead to the separation of these subgroups from each other. There is an increased amount of shared networks in transnational social spaces, among others in the internet. These networks and the biographical work in the networks are the subject of this paper.

In their everyday lives these migrants become "border crossers" with multiple identities and personal relations with different social groups both in Germany and abroad, because of their biographical experiences. The extent of these relations begins with their places of origin and can extend to countries where the different groups of migrants are concentrated such

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as Israel or USA in the case of Jewish migrants. These networks form an important resource for the migrants themselves and for the societies involved because they can facilitate the integration of individuals and contacts (in science, business or culture) between countries on the macro level.

2. Migrants from the former Soviet Union in Germany

The group of migrants in Germany from the former Soviet Union consists primarily of three differently large groups: "Resettlers", "Quota refugees" and "Transmigrants".

Resettlers (in German "Aussiedler") is the biggest group with 1,427,000 persons (Statistisches Bundesamt 2010: 60ff, Tab2l). The members of this group have German ancestry and receive the German citizenship immediately after immigration. They have usually lived in Germany for a long time, with the clear intention of staying in the country for the rest of their life.

The second largest subgroup among the Russian migrants in Germany consists of the persons of Jewish origin, so called Quota refugees ("Kontingentflüchtlinge" in German). According to the data of the central Jewish committee (2014) this group contains approx. 220,000 persons. This subgroup is more heterogeneous with regard to their citizenship and their intention to stay in Germany. Nevertheless, the majority of them plan to stay in Germany indefinitely. Some keep the citizenship of their country of origin (mostly Ukrainian and Russian), some obtain dual citizenship (German and of the country of origin) or even triple citizenship (German, Israeli and of the country of origin) and some remain stateless for a long period of time (e. g. migrants from Latvia), after which they finally obtain German citizenship.

The smallest subgroup of migrants from the former Soviet Union (Transmigrants) is the most heterogeneous one. The indicator of this subgroup is their precarious legal position, which results in more frequent migration episodes both to and from Germany. This subgroup includes asylum-seekers (e. g. from Belarus or the Caucasus), work migrants and their families, spouses of German citizens and illegal immigrants. A statistically verified number of this subgroup cannot be calculated.

We propose here not to speak about a 'migration community' when speaking of this group of Russian-speaking migrants in Germany, but to use the notion of "Russian Diaspora" (cf. Hepp 2006; Marx & Cohen 2010). Diasporas are defined by Hepp (2006) as "complex alliances, which constitute themselves with the help of enduring translocal relation networks". Also Marx and Cohen (2010: 9f.) extend the concept of diaspora also to the virtual communities in internet and argue that "Diasporic space is inscribed and re-inscribed in multiple and complex ways. Diaspora is symbolically, practically and instrumentally created and recreated". There are good reasons to use the concept of diaspora in this case. The notion of "migration groups" suggests certain homogeneity of the group, which is not present in this case. Further, migrants are seen as a temporary group who frequently move around. This cannot be said of the majority of the Russian-speaking migration subgroups. Finally, diaspora alliances exist permanently and transnationally; geographically spread and across national borders (Düvel 2008). This can be observed for the Russian speaking people in Germany, who mostly maintain contacts, not only in Germany and Russia, but also in other countries (e. g. USA, Ukraine or Israel).

Migrants from the former Soviet Union are generally confronted with similar problems in integration to other migrant groups (e. g. contacts with the indigenous society, command of language, status loss). However, there are some distinctive features of this migration group, which become apparent on closer examination.

Education has a high significance for the majority of the Russian Diaspora. This ensures a good institutional integration for individuals in comparison with other migration groups (cf. Elias & Lemish 2009). Young migrants in Germany in particular learn the language and integrate quickly and successfully into the school system as well as in further educational institutions.

In their private lives however they prefer to stay in their families and in peer groups of Russian origin. This is the case not only in Germany but also in other immigration countries (e. g. in Israel, USA or Australia; cf. Yelenevskaya 2005; Elias & Shorer-Zeltser 2006). It is in their families that young migrants receive their most important social support and emotional appreciation. Hence families and peer groups form the identity of the Russian speaking Diaspora.

In spite of this, there are some studies (s. Düvel 2008; Elias & Lemish 2009; Kissau 2008), which acknowledge the growing role of the internet communication in the identity building processes. Internet communities and social networks also provide migrants with social support, emotional affiliation and other resources for the coping with their lives in a new environment. These studies verify the development of transnational identity through the virtual contacts online. This means that the whole life script, national belonging, peer groups and even the language possess the features of both (or even more) cultures and cannot be comprehended without the consideration of each culture.

3. Migration and the internet

Migration experiences bring with them diverse challenges for the personality and the abilities of the people concerned. These challenges are primarily presented through the loss of identification, social contacts, and status, as well as various cognitive and financial disadvantages in the new society. The use of mass media can be seen as a resource for a successful adaptation (Kissau & Hunger 2009). The media can adopt the role of socialization agents in the new environment. For instance they can deliver examples of how one behaves in the everyday life or act as a substitute for the absence of communication. Additionally, new media like the internet provide diverse opportunities for active participation in a variety of social situations. Most importantly, active communication is possible in virtual social networks, which give an opportunity to overcome emotional problems or to try out diverse identities in a protected, anonymous space. Such internet communication exhibits an active, constructive practice, which has a strong impact on the individual's identity and everyday behavior (s. Elias & Lemish 2009).

Active participation in internet communication, e. g. in forums, chats, blogs and other discussion groups has also to be seen also from the perspective of the transnational ambivalence: between the wish for the integration in the new society and the converse wish for to preserve their own (original) national identity. According to one small ethnographical comparative study of the Russian diaspora in Germany and Israel (Yelenevskaya 2005) the respondents visited Russian-speaking homepages in the internet in order to convey and to share their feelings of alienation in their current surroundings, to affiliate themselves to other migrants from their country of origin and to create with them a joint social space. Interestingly, the country of origin was much more important for the creation of social spaces than the country of immigration or the country in which they were currently living, i. e. the internet social spaces were a priori transnational. Further, they were used by the migrants to define themselves, their identities, values or preferences.

4. The concept of Transdifference

In order to describe the creation, the features and the functions of the Russian Diaspora in the internet, the concept of transdifference (e. g. Kalscheuer & Allolio-Näcke 2008; Breinig & Lösch 2002) seems to be especially appropriate.

Transdifference can be defined as "an 'umbrella concept' for all non-linear phenomena, which cannot be classified in one clearly demarcated (binary) difference, which resist interpretation of the basis of binary thinking models" (Kalscheuer & Allolio-Näcke 2008: 11). The most important features of transdifference are: permanent reflection about the choice of the differentiation phenomena and the difference measures, processuality of the structures,

the possibility to study the subjective difference structures of the respondents and the subjective view, which defines their own identity by demarcation from the others.

The virtual Russian diaspora in diverse internet communities can be described well with the help of this concept. The differences and the differentiation processes in the Russian diaspora are fluid; the individuals find themselves permanently in a process of self-definition and identity-bargaining. The social spaces for these transdifference processes are not fixed. The composition of the participants in virtual discussion groups is in permanent flux, their structures are not fixed and their communication rules change incessantly. For this reason the following qualitative analysis is guided by the theoretical approach of the transdifference concept. In the area of medial communication, the digital media offer an opportunity for the development of transnational and transdifferent spaces.

As Friedrich Krotz (2007) states in his theory of mediatization, media are represented on different levels in modern society. On the temporal level media are constantly and permanently available. This means that open access to the contents of forums continuously spurs discourse. This is, in turn, central to the re-production of the transdifference. In the course of the discourse differences are being detected and defined, boundaries become clear, borders are being drawn and redrawn. This means that on the temporal level internet-based discussions do not contribute to an alignment of differences, but rather the differences are object to a permanent reflexive process; they are being permanently worked on and variously combined.

On the spatial level media connect places and spaces (Krotz 2007). People from different countries (and within countries from different social or national groups) contact each other, develop relationships with each other and define their group specific of transdifferent identity based on this new communicational experience (i. e. through demarcation or alignment).

Finally, on the social level the contents of the medial communication refer to more and more areas of the social life. The private and the public become increasingly mixed to a hitherto unknown extent. The differentiation between these two areas is also becoming fluid and transdifferent. This trend entails certain conceptual difficulties for identity research, however it also enables insights into highly intimate spheres of human life.

5. The study of German-Russian transnational spaces: sample and methodology

In the course of the study conducted on transnational spaces in the internet we analyzed the contents of some of the most influential and well-known forums. We differentiated between forums: between those which were specifically German-Russian and international ones. The German-Russian forums mostly were used by the Russian diaspora in Germany and are oriented to their everyday lives and the specific problems of the migrants. The international forums were used by the Russian diaspora in Germany as well as by the Russian diaspora in other foreign countries (mostly USA, Canada and Israel) and by the public of the various countries within the former Soviet Union. Among other topics specific problems of migration (including the Russian-German diaspora) are being discussed in these forums.

The Russian-German forums were:
- http://www.germany.ru,
- http://vorota.de,
- http://forum.russnet.de,
- http://www.ruslink.de/forum.html.

The international forums were:
11. www.odnoklassniki.ru (diverse groups),
12. www.livejournal.ru

The contents of the chosen sources were analyzed according the method of qualitative content analysis developed by Mayring (2003). After the analysis of the contents of the forums narrative in-depth interviews with especially active members were conducted. These are however beyond the scope of the present paper.

The qualitative analysis of the biographical narratives adopts the socio-biographical approach and aims to contextualize the migrants' "points of view". As Rustin and Chamberlayne (2002: 2) state:

'Biographical studies of individual citizens are a valuable means of exploring the conditions of life in rapidly changing societies. In particular, these studies can illuminate the experiences and problems of transitions from one societal situation or milieu to another'.

6. Results of the study

6.1 The objects of the exchange: Contents of the discourse

Generally, the contents of the forums exhibit a great variety of themes. Even in specific forums, oriented towards the specific problems of migrants, it is not only these problems that are discussed. There were no (or very few) thematic restrictions in the analyzed internet spaces.

The contents of the internet communication in the analyzed forums can be summarized as follows:

♦ *News* exchange. People who do not have an access to the usual information channels (e. g. because of insufficient knowledge of German) have an opportunity to inform themselves through this channel about the current news in Germany. Subjective interpretations, evaluations or assumptions are an integral part of this news, so its reliability fluctuates.

♦ Exchange of *technical know-how*. The use of programs and devices, the prices, pros and cons of certain technical equipment are discussed; users' personal experiences are shared.

♦ *Cooking recipes* constitute a large amount of internet communication.

♦ *Nostalgic recollections,* though not frequent, are consistently present in all very different forums. In these the 1970s and 1980s (as the time of the childhood and the youth of the majority of the participants) are idealized, cities, schools or Universities are described. For these themes emotional statements are typical. The role of the transdifference is especially important for this thematic group: individuals build communities according to certain common features (e. g. the city of birth), identify themselves through their belonging to these specific communities, but nevertheless within the community they maintain differentiation through additional features (e. g. profession or migrational status).

♦ Finally, *specific knowledge* can be exchanged in the forums. E. g. *medical knowledge* about childhood diseases, vaccinations, tests for specific illnesses, best methods of treatment. Further, items of legal advice (e. g. about the feasibility of immigration to Germany) are widespread as a very important topic in the forums. Also finances (e. g. money investment, insurances) are constantly being discussed.

Generally, as with many other internet sources, the reliability of all kinds of information given is very poor. It could be argued that in the forum discussions the point is not the objective knowledge and its transfer, but the subjective meanings, interpretations, evaluations or conceptions. So the discussions should be analyzed from this point of view: not as an objective source of (e. g. financial) information but as a reflection of the subjective 'world picture' of the migrants and the Russian Diaspora in general. These narratives provide us with deep insights into the world of the Russian diaspora in Germany. In all their variety they describe the transdifference of the structures and are very useful tool for gaining an understanding of the processes of differentiation and alignment.

In the great majority of the forums the participants understand the unreliability of the information which is passed on there. They are willing to put up with this shortcoming because the accuracy of the information is not their primary need. They are not seeking a reliable source

of information in a virtual internet community. They are looking for a social life there, which is, in essence, fluid and unreliable. The occurrences in virtual reality have a real sense of life for the participants. This is not something unreal or imaginary but real life in which times, countries, cultures and contents are constantly being mixed up.

"I am now in Germany and talk to an 'Israeli' about the kindergardens here, with an 'American' about the bilingual education, with an 'Indian' about traveling and literature, with a 'Canadian' about cooking. (…) There's no real distance here! We belong together. Really!" (N.)

The participants try (more or less critically) to create from this collage a concept of their own lives in the foreign culture with new challenging problems. This concept must be creative, because many of the participants do not have role models (yet). The transdifferent discussions deliver only partly reliable information and acceptable problem solutions. So the participants are prepared to accept inaccuracy and unreliability of the information, firstly because this is not the most important feature of the communication, which primarily provides emotional support and feelings of belonging. Secondly, the information from the 'real world' is often either not reliable, e. g. because of the speed of change or the very specific problems of the migrants.

6.1.1 Knowledge and status
A great deal of knowledge is shared in the internet forums. So the question emerges: what does it mean for a migrant to be able to answer a question in his internet community? The writing of a contribution (posting) involves a certain amount of work, time investment and effort, so there must be sense of value connected with it. This value must be hidden in the subjective evaluation, since the answering in forums is rewarded neither financially nor through personal contact.

"Giving an answer is even more pleasant than getting an answer to your own question." (K.)

Such statements are frequently found in the analyzed forums. The participants asked themselves this question, wondering about their altruism, reflected on their dedication and tried to answer the question. The most prevalent argument was the reputation in the community, which improves after providing competent advice. This can be seen as a compensation for many situations in the "real world", where the participants of the forums are represented as ignorant migrants. Their standing in the virtual community takes on a special importance, so that many migrants are ready to invest substantial amounts of time in the work on the questions in forums.

Further, their reputation is not only dependent on the quantity of the questions they answer questions, but also on the credibility of their answers. This credibility is often a product of the social support in forums. Well known participants, who have been part of the community for a long time, or participants who are considered to be interesting or likable for any reason, get more approval and praise, even if their information is objectively wrong. The posts of unknown or anonymous participants are often overlooked.

From this reason successful strategies employed to get a better reputation in forums differ strongly from the strategies in the "real world". The experienced participants try to arrange their answers more credibly e. g. through a detailed description of their own biography with an impact on the situations which are relevant to the given question.

"My job in a temporary employment agency (I've got no other employment) was paid so badly, that the social welfare office had to top it up to reach the minimum wage. In addition I was transported 120 km from my house every day. The traveling time was not paid at all. The job was simply a nightmare. I was suspended on a rope and had to scratch rust from ships with an abrasive block. I got home very late and absolutely exhausted." [R. Preamble to a post about the financial and ethical backgrounds of illicit work]

Many private details are reported in open access, in order to present oneself with the smallest possible degree of anonymity, and the greatest degree of concrete reality. This is an interesting, ambiguous process, which aims partially to abolish the anonymity of the internet communications media. Presumably it is only possible because the form of the communication situation (alone in front of the computer) simulates great anonymity and security. Thus, sensitive pictures (e. g. naked, drunk) are being uploaded or participants report openly about private problems, illegal actions, illnesses or conflicts, disregarding the fact that confidential information is being revealed, which can potentially harm the participant.

To sum up, it is important to reiterate that the status and a reputation of a community member do not (or not very much) depend on the correctness of the information or from his or her objective expertise. It depends on the image, which they are permanently creating and supporting through the presentation of their own biographical work to the community. The information which is passed in forums is often (as well known) objectively wrong. This paradox becomes possible because the sense, the real point, of participation in the forum discussions is not the exchange of information, but much more social support and the creation of the social networks.

6.1.2 Contacts

As already stated in section 6.1.1, the anonymity in forums is dispensed with in order to increase the value of the statements participants make. A side effect is the development of personal closeness, personal contacts and friendships. These contacts are cultivated not only in forums but also with the help of e-mails, Skype, chats and other media and sometimes also beyond the communications media, directly. What does it mean for a migrant to know somebody from the internet community? How do the participants of the forums evaluate these unconventionally established relationships?

The most frequent answer to this question is self-evident: migrants need these contacts in order to feel their belonging to a community, not to be alone, which is very important for many people, who have lost their social environment after their emigration.

Further, some participants see in the growing number of their contacts the possibility to widen their expertise, e. g. to gather insider information from other countries (for example for a possible further migration or for traveling), to find a cheap accommodation while traveling or to be quickly informed about something.

V.: "During the flight from Germany to Russia I'll have to change in Istanbul and wait there for a relatively long time. Who's already been there? How long does it take to get from the airport into the city, what does it cost and what about the visa?"

E.: "I've been through there. In order to get out of the airport you need a visa, they paste it in the passport. It's valid for about 2 months, costs €15. To the center you can take the subway, approximately 30 minutes, directly from the airport. The ticket costs a ludicrous, 1.5 of their local currency."

L: "I want to get to Germany!!!! Give me some advice, something 100% real! Job, study, business… No marriage!!!"

P.: "Germany is not a migration country like USA, Canada or New Zealand."

L.: "Would it be realistic to buy a business, but not too expensive, something like barber-shop or a café?"

Le.: "Such a business [purchase] is worth considering in the Czech Republic or Bulgaria or to buy some real estate there. From there you would have more chances to migrate to Europe after some time."

Some participants see a status symbol in their numerous international contacts. With their help they can present themselves as cosmopolitan, widely informed and experienced.

The motivation to establish virtual contacts also affects everyday behavior. On the basis of the information passed on in these discussions, migrants design their everyday lives and take a variety of biographical decisions (e. g. marriage, child rearing, dealing with legal authorities or further migration). This means that the virtual transnational spaces strongly influence the reality beyond the internet.

6.2 Emerging transnational spaces in internet

This poses question of how transnational spaces in the internet work. How do these spaces function and what functions do they have for migrants and their biographical work? We believe that transnationality (i. e. fluid openness for migrants and non-migrants from different countries) plays a central role in the functioning of the forums of the Russian diaspora. It is not the geographical dispersal of the participants which makes the difference between national and transnational social spaces. It is reflecting on the differences (of identity, of biography) which makes a qualitative change in social practices. The transnational character of these spaces is shaped through transnational networks and transnational identities, which should be described further.

6.2.1 Transnational Networks

The emergence of new transnational networks is a subject of discussion, and is reflected in the forums of the Russian diaspora. This process, which includes all discussion participants, is not to be taken for granted, but a something special, fascinating and needing analysis.

"So you sit sometimes in front of the computer and think: the virtual world has fully absorbed me, the internet replaces real life, I have no more friends and anyway! (…) And then you see Skype is going on, one little window is blinking, then the second one, then one more and in every window is a friend. From Georgia, from Germany, from the USA. What kind of virtual reality is that supposed to be? If you really *feel the warmth?"* (G., living in Prague).

She uploads the following picture as a support of her arguments.

Image 1: Example of one transnational network. Screenshot from the desktop of a discussion participant.
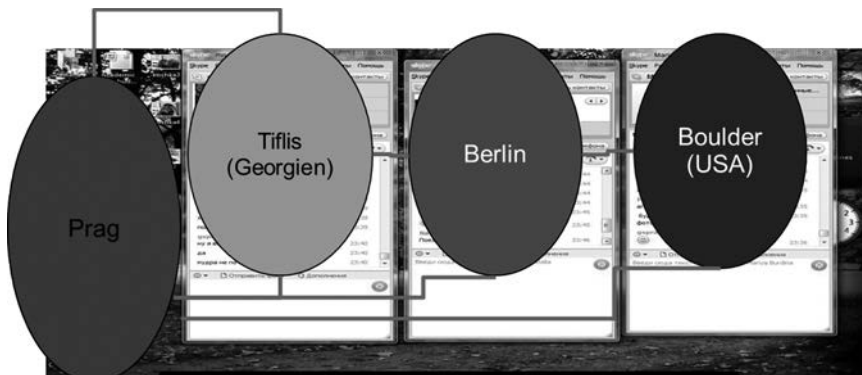
6.2.2 Transnational identities

Communication in transnational spaces begins with a balancing act between their original and foreign identities. A relationship based on the criteria of similarity is built up. E. g. on comparing him or her-self with the other participants in the discussion regarding the interests or origins (cf. section 6.1). This is the manner in which relationships between transnational groups of people, who formerly lived in Charkow, now live in Berlin and are interested in cars

or cooking, are built up. The members of the groups identify themselves with their group. They express this identification by addressing the other members with the name of the group (e. g. "Германцы", meaning the members of the forum "germany.ru") or calling the forum "their home", where they feel comfortable and homely. However this identification is only the partial one. Inside the group there are differences stemming from other, additional criteria, and these promote the development of the subgroups.

A national and territorial sense of belonging is only one identifying factor among others. Their profession (present or former) is for example also a very important attribute, which helps to develop their own identity in transnational spaces. Further important attributes, which promote the identity development are manifold. Here are only a few examples: personal success (e. g. graduation, career, building a house), children (e. g. way of raising them), nostalgic experiences, citizenship, specific experiences and knowledge (e. g. legal). Most of these attributes are connected with important biographical steps. In the course of the discussions and reflections they become the central point of the biography to which the further narrative constantly refers. The identity-building processes start from this re-thinking and re-conceptualization of their own biography, on the basis of the central points which are shared by the other members of the internet community.

As soon as the questions of identity and belonging have been answered (as well as already in the process of identity building), the well-established concepts and notions start to be questioned and tested. Nothing is certain in the transnational spaces of the internet forums; everything is fluid, involved in the permanent process of evolution, difficult to grasp and genuinely transdifferent. To explain this point we cite here as examples two discourses about citizenship and the language development of children.

V.: *"What is the advantage of the German citizenship?"*

g.: "*Why not* [get several citizenships]? *Apply in Bavaria and get the German citizenship and keep the Russian."*

п.: *" Some people make a hobby out of collecting citizenships. I have lived myself 6 years without passports and citizenships and can say — it is only worthless article, leftover from the past*

[Continues: the acquisition of the German citizenship has also disadvantages, e. g. one cannot work in a foreign country, and otherwise one loses the German citizenship]

t.: "*Enormous numbers of Israelis get the Canadian citizenship and go directly back to Israel again in order to work there. I have heard the same about the Netherlands. And about the UK. Surely this would also be possible in Germany* [to work in a foreign country without losing the German citizenship]."

T.: "*Absolutely unclear, how do people plan their whole life in a country without acquiring its citizenship. Do they wish to return back* [to the country of origin]?! *To live in a country absolutely without any rights* [is impossible]!"

In this example the participants in this discussion only partly identify themselves with their present country of residence (i. e. Germany). The demarcation lines go through their attitude to naturalization. Whereas for **T.** naturalization is absolutely logical and self-evident, **п.** brags about his/her abilities to survive without any citizenship, positioning him/herself as modern, enlightened, cosmopolitan. Other participants in the discussion have not defined their positions yet, but question everything and gather material to assist their own orientation. The objective correctness of the information (which is not given here) does not play a great role in this process.

D.: *"I grew up in a family, where the grandpa spoke 6 languages, the grandma 3, mama 2 and papa 1 language. Life has so developed, that now I have relatives who do not speak Russian. (…) And I think it is very important, that* [my] *child takes the best from every culture, which it encounters".*

In this example **D.** broaches the issue of language belonging as a substitute for national belonging. **D.** refuses to make a final decision in favor of one culture and one language for herself/himself and for her/his child. **D.** advocates the possibility of the transculturality by bringing examples from his/her own biography and family history. These examples prove the feasibility of the identity aimed for and the life project. The active participation in a transcultural forum gives her/him a space for reflection on her/his own experiences and the legitimation to transfer the past experiences to the present, in order to adjust her/his own method of education to these experiences. For the other participants in this discussion these private details have another function. They make the proposition of **D.** credible and give additional point to her/his words (s. 6.1.1.).

7. What is real in the virtual transdifference?

The presented results of the study show clearly that the transdifference of the Russian diaspora which is developing in the virtual social spaces of the internet has a great impact on everyday life in the "real world".

The encounters in the transnational forums can promote deep insights into a foreign national culture as a result of the manifold personal, and even private, information provided about the daily life of the community members. The participants in the discussion acquire new perspectives and attitudes concerning diverse everyday problems, because they obtain an opportunity to compare their own perspectives and practices with the unknown alternatives and to reflect about their appropriateness.

The transformational potential is especially strong among migrants. They are pulled out of their familiar routines and seek directions for behavior models and creative strategies to help them cope with their new reality. Frequently they find transcultural solutions for their problems, while combining components from different cultures.

Additionally, discussion in transdifferent forums also can initiate biographical change processes as a result of the additional information gained and/or reflection about their own biographical projects. This change could be, for instance, a further migration in a third country or a return to their country of origin.

Discussions about such changes and their normality can be interpreted as a contribution of internet communication to the transnationalization of the Russian diaspora. Reflections about their own biography, their own ways of living and identity are central to the subjective normalization of transculturality. The participants in the discussions often find out in these transnational social spaces that transcultural tendencies have a tradition, i. e. existed in their own family. This enables migrants to cope with their biography and their national identity creatively. They create a basis for transcultural biographical projects for themselves and for their children.

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